DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 065 073 HE 003 233

AUTHOR Tobias, Sheila
TITLE New Feminism on a University Campus: From Job Equality to Female Studies.
PUB DATE 9 Nov 70
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Symposium on Feminism, University of Pittsburgh, September 23-24, 1970

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Educational Opportunities; *Equal Opportunities (Jobs); Females; *Feminism; *Higher Education; *Sex Discrimination; *Womens Education; *Womens Studies; Women Teachers

ABSTRACT

In her speech to the Symposium on Feminism, the author relates the growth and accomplishments of the women's movement at Cornell University. When the author first went to Cornell, not only were no women on tenure in the history, government, economics, English, physics, chemistry and math departments, but pride was taken that there had never been women on the faculties of the history, government or economics departments. A conference was held on the subject of equal opportunities for women and at a 1969 conference a NOW chapter was formed on the Cornell campus. Since that time, this organization has succeeded in ending the admissions quotas for women in various departments, has ended parietal rules and residence rules for women, and has instituted a branch of Planned Parenthood on campus so that every undergraduate female will have success to contraceptive counseling and devices. Another achievement of the 1969 conference was the development of Female Studies at Cornell. The first course taught was "The Evolution of the Female Personality." This course touches on history, sociology, literature, intellectual history, and anthropology, and was found to be of interest to undergraduate men as well as women. (HS)

ED 065073

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"NEW FEMINISM ON A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS: FROM JOB EQUALITY TO FEMALE STUDIES"

Sheila Tobias
Associate Provost, Wesleyan University

Delivered at University of Pittsburgh

Symposium on Feminism

September 23 and 24

HE003233

It struck me that this group would be particularly interested not in the theories that we, as individuals, developed at Cornell, but on the subject of what happened at Cornell in the area of feminism. And for that reason I brought with me three of my colleagues and they will speak later or answer your questions--whichever pleases you and whichever pleases them. On my right is Jane Camhi. Jane has been an educator and an administrator at Cornell in the Center for International Studies Program.

Next to her is Arlene Ryan who is our professional. We raised enough money this year, as I will explain to you shortly, to hire Arlene half-time as a Director of Female Studies, charged with further development and research in this area at Cornell.

And on my left is Jennie Farley, recently awarded a Ph.D. in Sociology, who was active in some of the earliest aspects of feminism at Cornell, which I'll be describing in the course of my brief introductory remarks.

I am a historian by training and I know that nothing is more difficult to write than contemporary history, particularly the history that one lives through. If I ask myself when and how feminism began at Cornell, I have to borrow the analysis of Jennie Farley, who has written on this subject, and say: it started in what seemed to be a very innocuous way, long before Kate Millett's book was written, long before women's liberation groups appeared and were written about in Time magazine, long before Betty Friedan's NOW organization made the headlines. It began with a group of faculty wives at an Ivy League, very well known, university when these very well educated women found themselves unable to get reasonable jobs in the Ithaca community. By "reasonable," I mean intellectually stimulating and creative, well paid, though part-time. These women were mothers. They were beginning to think about what activities they would undertake again when their children were grown. And they found the Personnel Office simply unable to cope with their particular needs. They knew very well that their skills were needed and so they organized, not as a political group, but a group that appeared to be nothing more than a little employment agency.

Thus the "Professional Skills Roster" was born at Cornell. Ironically, the women who formed that committee would be very surprised to hear me refer to theirs as the first inkling of new feminism on the Cornell campus because they were not feminists in any conscious or political way. They were simply responding to a particular kind of problem. The Professional Skills Roster proceeded to seek for funds so that they could man this employment agency. Funds were made available at first and then discontinued. The employment of wives was not a university priority. That was Act One.

The second Act, I think, (modestly) began with my arrival on the campus. I came from a big city and had never before worked in what I came to realize was an institution studded (if you'll pardon the expression) with male chauvinism. Without alienating the men in this room, let me explain what that means. Cornell is an Ivy League school that purports to be coed; yet, I was struck from the beginning with the obvious fact that the faculty is not coed; the administration is not coed. Indeed, there was an upper level of jobs beyond which no woman in the University could go, except for those in the so-called College of Home Economics. In the course of my very first year at Cornell, I witnessed a renovation of the College of Home Economics. In order to bring it into the 20th century, the name was changed to College of Human Ecology and their very first act was to take advantage of the retirement of a female dean and find a male dean to lead the College of Human Ecology back into the mainstream. Moreover, I witnessed a concerted effort made to get men to come into that College by expanding the departments that are of interest to both sexes; whereas no counterpart recruitment of women was undertaken in the Colleges of Engineering, or Agriculture, or Industrial Labor Relations. These anomalies in the Cornell situation struck me as I arrived on the campus from the big city where at least the anomalies are not quite as striking. At City College in my own department of history, there had been several women, one on tenure. At Cornell not only were no women on tenure in the history, government, economics, English, physics, chemistry and math, but pride in the fact that no woman had ever been on the faculties of history, government or economics, for example.

The male chauvinism radicalized me and I began to read on the subject. I joined national NOW and soon thereafter inquired of T. Grace Atkinson, then president of New York NOW, whether it would be possible to run a symposium, much like yours here, on the Cornell campus. T. Grace put me in touch with Kate Millett and with the assistance of her own much more radical thinking on the subject of women, we designed a conference very different from the traditional women's conference. We started with the assumption that the woman's problem is not a woman's problem; it is a social problem. There is something wrong with a society that cannot find ways to make it possible for married women, single women, intelligent women, educated or uneducated, or welfare women, to achieve their full measure of reward.

The second assumption of our conference was that the problems for women associated with jobs and employment, education and contraception could not be isolated from the fundamental, psychological problems that all women suffer at every age level. . . problems that we now recognize as having to do with a very low self-esteem. And so the very first title of the symposium we held at Cornell was, not "Equal Education for Women" or "Equal Jobs for Women": rather it was "How Do Men Look at Women?" and "How Do Women Look at Themselves?" because it was our conviction, even at that early stage, that this is the very heart of the problem. Kate Millett said it for us: Women look at themselves the way men look at them. Not even their sense of themselves is their own. They let the men in their lives, and the men in the media, tell them who they are, how they are to behave, what are the valuable aspects of their character and what they must repress or deny within their nature.

The third assumption we made in 1968 was that the political dimension of this "Woman's Question" (we preferred the term sex-role debate) could not be overlooked. We were already aware that as more and more women's liberation groups formed out of SDS there was going to be a debate about priorities for all of us. Most sensitive, underpaid and underprivileged women are also active politically in other movements and our problem was: which was going to come first. If you recall, 1968-69 was a period of very heavy anti-war activity and SDS activity on campus. So many of us are white; so many of us are middle class; so many of us are rich, or relatively rich, and well educated, how can we really stand up and say that for us the first priority is better jobs and better opportunities for women, given the state of the world. I don't pretend that we solved this problem; but we have spent a lot of time thinking about this problem and many of the interesting developments among the women's groups on our campus have centered around this. My own personal solution to the problem of priorities is this: that among women we have, potentially, a tremendous political force that need only be released through women's liberation for the liberation of other people. There may be those of you in the audience who will disagree with me and I welcome your criticism. But for me, this is ample justification for spending one's time and one's energies in women's liberation.

Our January 1969 conference on women had at least two long-lasting results. One was a political organization. For fairly arbitrary reasons, we formed a NOW chapter. Part of the reason we selected NOW was that the average age of our conference organizers was a little bit older than undergraduates, and we responded very much to Betty Friedan, Kate Millett and T. Grace, who were all, still then, in NOW. Another reason we selected NOW was that we were very early. Women's liberation did not exist on our campus; it hardly existed nationally; we were feeling our way. At the moment there is a profound discussion going on at Cornell as to whether there is need for a NOW chapter for undergraduates on our campus now that there are women's liberation collectives. If you're interested, I can tell you more about that in the question period. For now suffice it to say that one of the ramifications of our conference was the formation of a NOW chapter which took upon itself several issues that I think are relevant to <u>this</u> community as well.

One was day care. Of the many things that unite all women, for those who already have children or those who are planning to have children, the absence of day care and the restrictions on contraception are two of the most urgently felt. It was our hope that we could get together a day care system that would serve non-academic employees of the University, faculty wives, undergraduates and graduate students alike. This was a very appealing project because solidarity of women was our great goal. This project never got off the ground. The cost, the restrictions, the health code, the complications were too much for our NOW chapter. The first action program was a failure. We still have no day care facilities at Cornell. Nor are any planned for the forseeable future.

NOW also undertook a study of the status of women on our campus. I understand that you already have selected a commission to study the status of women at Pittsburgh. No one had ever before revealed the male-

female ratio, on the various levels in the various ranks, in the various departments on our faculty. We found that of our faculty of 1,400, 10% were women. But, of this roughly 100 or 120, 75 were in this College of Home Economics I referred to earlier, and very, very few were scattered elsewhere. Interesting was the absence of women from the faculty in precisely those fields that are supposed to be female--History of Art, English, or Romance Languages--the so called "artsie" fields. These are the fields that you undergraduate women are encouraged to go into because they are so "feminine" but on the top level as full professors, there were no women in any of these departments at Cornell. And it was very shocking to reveal this to the community. We also looked briefly, at the status of graduate students, and although we couldn't point to specific discrimination, it was perfectly clear from reports that every graduate student girl had been asked when applying whether or not she was planning to get married. She was frequently evaluated on confidential forms, in terms of her appearance. It might be written of her that she was "too pretty" to take her graduate work seriously. Or the contrary: that being "funny looking" you could probably count on her to finish.

At the same time we had very disturbing feedback from another aspect of the questionnaire we sent out to graduate students asking them a whole lot of questions about their lives and their aspirations. If one can generalize on the basis of a small sample, these graduate women had not thought through their lives. At one and the same time, they claimed to be committed to a career but they wanted an average of 3.4 children. They were ambivalent on the subject of being women, fuzzy on their recollections of discrimination. Some of them said they had never been discriminated against; yet by inference from their vitas they had been. We were discovering over and over again that it's what's in the head that really is operating here and that any study of women on a campus could simply not stop with their status. We had to somehow get into their heads.

In the course of another report on the status of women, an undergraduate student of ours wrote personal impressions of what being a coed is really like. I brought the report along and later in the question period, if you are interested I'll be glad to read it to you. She described what it was like to sit in a class where the professor is male; where the assumption is that the males are going to have all the creative ideas; where if a woman raises her hand and makes an original comment it is considered bizarre and out of place; when a man makes exactly the same comment he is applauded for his originality; where a woman is treated very much in terms of her sexuality both by her male colleagues and her female friends. She described, really, the inside of what it's like to be a woman in a coed institution. And it was very enlightening for us all.

Before I leave the arena of political action, let me tell you what we succeeded at doing at Cornell lest you become disheartened. In the course of a year we managed to end a quota on women in the College of Arts and Sciences at Cornell which had operated for 100 years. For reasons that were very, very specious, upon investigation, the College only accepted one woman for every two men. They took about 6 men for every one woman in the College of Industrial Labor Relations. They took about

30 men for every one woman in Engineering, although we exonerated Engineering, somewhat, from our invective because after all there's a lot of socialization that has to be overcome before a woman chooses engineering. But we did not forgive Industrial Labor Relations and we did not forgive the Arts college. And we managed in the course of this year to end that quota. We also ended discrimination in the implementation of parietal rules and residence rules for women. And, finally, with the help of women's liberation, we managed to get a branch of Planned Parenthood on campus so that every undergraduate female will have access to contraceptive counseling and devices. These were the successes on the Cornell campus.

The second ramification of the Conference on Women--and this is the topic that I shall continue in the workshop--is the development of Female Studies at Cornell. At the conference I, as an educator, was struck, not only by the political dimension of what we had discussed, but also by the intellectual dimension. For one thing the symposium had been intellectually very sophisticated. For another thing, the material coming out of women's liberation and out of NOW implied a challenge to the experts that was formidable. I don't know how familiar you are with Betty Friedan's book, for instance, but it is not to be dismissed as polemic; it is sociology. And it is very sophisticated sociology insofar as Friedan has done a thoroughgoing comparison of the women's magazines from 1918, or so, to the present in a content analysis. Her conclusions are based soundly on her research. For those of you who have already had the privilege of reading Kate Millett's book, Sexual Politics, I think you can defend its intellectual content. Millett has done an analysis of literature and an analysis of politics which draws on her enormous reading. And even those reviewers who disagree with her conclusions have not been able to take her to task intellectually. The worst thing that they can say of her is that she is biased, and "peppery". But she is intellectually of the first rank.

I don't know how many of you have ever seen Naomi Weisstein's paper "Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Psychology Reconstructs the Female", but this constitutes a very serious criticism of the field of Psychology, where on the basis of Freud's half a dozen experiences with hysterical women a construct about the female personality has been developed which is now taught in psychology classes as if it were a tested theory. Although this is not my field, it strikes me that Naomi Weisstein, like any other first-rate, creative intellectual, has pointed to avenues for further research which could keep a population of academics busy for quite some time.

As an educator I was also impressed with the degree to which the undergraduates were turned on by women's liberation and thought if we could combine this with their studies this would be a way of making their studies more relevant. And so that Spring, immediately, after the Conference, half a dozen women who had attended the conference asked for credit in a "teach yourself" seminar in which they read with very little supervision some of the books we had recommended to them. I went to one or two of those meetings and was struck by the fact that they were floundering. It is hard enough to work without guidance in a field that has its distinct parameters. You know if you are going to teach

yourself German history you start in the Middle Ages; you proceed to the Renaissance; and then move on to the 18th and 19th centuries. But in the "feminism" course, the students were having to design a field and learn it at the same time.

The following Fall, a group of us decided that this whole area was worth our concerted attention as teachers and as academics. We organized a faculty seminar, dividing among ourselves, depending upon our special preparations, the various subjects we found interesting. Each of us prepared lectures and reading suggestions for what would become a course on women. At the time we didn't have a title, or a format; we didn't even know the dimensions of the field. All we knew was it was going to be inter-disciplinary because we were from many disciplines, and it was going to be about women.

The result of that faculty seminar has now been reproduced and sent around the country several times. It is a syllabus entitled "The Evolution of Female Personality." (I have it here in some quantity.) The "Evolution of Female Personality" is a course that touches on history, sociology, social psychology, family sociology, literature, intellectual history, and anthropology. It was taught by a core of five persons (only one of whom was a man) and was complemented by some 14 extra lectures by outside speakers.

What is significant as far as Cornell is concerned is the impact that the course had locally. Two hundred and three students registered for the course which made it the largest attended course in the College of Human Ecology in that semester. One hundred and fifty audited irregularly and, until the strike over Cambodia, the lecturers found themselves speaking to a hall of 500 people.

We learned that our students didn't have to be in Women's Lib to find the subject significant. The advantages to having a big lecture course was that our students were not the already converted. Nor did we aim to convert them. Rather, we were anxious to communicate academically sound experiences to a broad spectrum of people.

There was no doubt by the end of the course that we had opened up a new field. There is plenty of research to be done; there are plenty of other books to read; there's plenty of library work to be done. This is a field worth the attention of a University. On the basis of that success of the course, Jane and Jennie and I called a conference on the future of female studies at Cornell in May of this year. Although the course was only two and one half months going, we called in outsiders in history, literature, sociology and psychology and asked them to think with us about a future program in female studies. Out of this meeting came a proposal for which we now have a raised $20,000 with which 1.) to give two or more courses this year--one in education and one in literature; 2.) to repeat "Evolution of Female Personality" in the spring; 3.) to begin to plug into existing research--research that other people are doing; 4.) to do new research and 5.) to establish ourselves in the end at Cornell as an academic program with as much reason and right to exist on the campus as any other academic program. And that is what female studies is all about.

Nationally female studies is cropping up in other places having slightly different goals. We started with the course and then went to a program. Some people are starting with the program and then going to the courses and your own Roberta Salper, I gather, is out at San Diego State now, running a similar program. But I come here to justify to you the right of a field like this to exist. The obstacles are incredible! A Professor in the English Department will tell you that the subject of women in literature or the images of women in fiction is a meaningless subject or a destructive subject or a non-existent subject or a subject that he refuses to allow his department to get involved in. The resistance to any analogies with black studies (and this issue is a tricky one) are resisted by faculty who say "Well, we were ready to concede that the Blacks have reason to study their own history." But certainly women can't be equated or analogized with Blacks!! The resistance to spending any money for women undergraduate students, whom one gets the feeling the University is only grudgingly educating anyway, is very strong. What made us succeed at Cornell was the concerted effort of many women who found themselves able to focus their academic training on this new subject and to deliver a course with as much professional ability as enthusiasm. It might happen differently at Pittsburgh. In our workshop I would be glad to talk to you about ideas you might have for starting something like this at Pittsburgh. But let me end simply by telling you that whether it happens at Pittsburgh or not, there will be at least 30 female studies programs in the U. S. by next year. We think there are already 100 new courses on women. There may be 300 next year. There are a dozen books coming out this year that are designed for courses like that: readers; a book on the Southern Woman; a book on the history of women; Alice Rossi's new introduction to John Stewart Mill's and Harriet Taylor Mill's writings about women--all of which implies that we are really on the brink of a new field which we're calling female studies.

Sheila Tobias
November 9, 1970